



Commentators occasionally disagree about the interpretation of a number in the biblical text. Differences of opinion occur in connection with numbers in narrative passages, but more significant debate arises over numbers in eschatological passages. Because biblical numbers sometimes present a hermeneutical challenge, we offer the following observations to aid in the task of exegesis.

1. Scribal Errors

Transcription errors crept into biblical manuscripts over the centuries, a quantity of which involve numbers. As noted in *Hard Sayings of the Bible*,

The transmission of numbers in ancient documents was especially susceptible to textual error due to the fact that the [numerical] systems were so diverse and with little standardization between cultures or periods of history in the same nation or culture.¹

¹ Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., et al, *Hard Sayings of the Bible*, p. 51.

Consequently, whether due to scribal carelessness or confusion, large numbers in the Old Testament can be particularly problematic, notoriously in the book of Numbers. A definite error occurs, for example, in Numbers 3.15-39, a passage in which three addends, 7,500, 8,600, and 6,200 do not add up to the sum of 22,000.² In this case, since the sum is confirmed as correct by the following verses (Nu 3.40-51), Keil and Delitzsch are probably correct in saying that, “in v. 28 we should read שלִש for שש,”³ i.e. *three* for *six*, resulting in an addend of 8,300 instead of 8,600.⁴ Other problematic large numbers in the book of Numbers are not so easily accounted for, as Timothy R. Ashely helpfully explains in his “Excursus on Large Numbers.”⁵ Thankfully, none of the debated large numbers in the Old Testament significantly affect the overall meaning of their contexts, nor impact a biblical doctrine.

Some numerical transcription errors in the Old Testament can be corrected by parallel passages. For example, the Hebrew text of 2 Chronicles 22.2 says that Ahaziah was forty-two years old when he became king upon the death of his father *who had died at forty years of age*. Ahaziah could hardly have been older than his father. The Hebrew text of 2 Kings 8.26 preserves the correct number for Ahaziah’s age at his coronation, namely twenty-two, and some of our translations (NASB, LBLA, etc.) have corrected the number in the Hebrew text of 2 Chronicles 22.2 to *twenty-two*.

Now, the corollary to the fact that scribal errors occur more commonly with larger numbers in the earlier books of the Bible, is that such errors are less likely with smaller numbers and with numbers in the New Testament. Nevertheless, when questions arise about a biblical number, our first concern is to ascertain, if possible, whether a copyist error has occurred. If we suspect that it has, then we

² All of these numbers, as with all numbers in Scripture, are written out phonetically rather than with figures.

³ *Commentary on the Old Testament*, Vol. 1, p. 664.

⁴ Curiously, the LXX does change the second addend to 6,050 (Nu 3.34) but still maintains the sum of 22,000 (Nu 3.39).

⁵ *The Book Of Numbers*, p. 60, ff.

must investigate whether parallel passages or other evidence supports a different number in the place of the questionable one.

2. Different Ways Of Measuring

Biblical authors express measurements differently than we do in our time and culture. For example, Jonah 3.3 describes the 8th c. BC city of Nineveh as “a three days’ journey in breadth.”⁶ To us, that means that the city would take three days to walk, or ride a burro, from one end of the city in a straight line to the other end. However, the archaeological remains of Nineveh imply a walled city of no more than 3 miles in diameter. There are a handful of solutions to this seeming error of measurement on Jonah’s part, so the interpreter should not hastily resort to a figurative, or even hyperbolic, explanation. There is some ambiguity in the Hebrew expression, מֵהֶלֶךְ שְׁלֹשֶׁת יָמִים, *a walk of three days*: does it mean in breadth or in circumference? Even the circumference of the archaeological remains, however, is too small to account for it taking three days to circumambulate.⁷ The more important consideration, beyond the probability that Nineveh was understood by the Hebrews to include both its immediate “suburbs” outside the walled city as well as its “sister cities” within an 18-mile radius,⁸ is the nature of the city itself, both architectural and moral. We assume that by “a walk of three days” Jonah meant by way of a linear or circular path (on paved streets or sidewalks), but one could probably not walk across 8th c. BC Nineveh in a straight line. One might have had to take a circuitous route, not only to avoid narrow streets congested by foot traffic, but also to bypass dangerous neighborhoods. The point is that the interpreter of biblical measurements must remain aware of his modern presuppositions and compare them to the historical data — *or lack of data* — currently available.

⁶ ESV.

⁷ *The Facts On File Dictionary Of Archaeology* estimates the circumference of Nineveh’s city wall in its “heyday,” about a century after Jonah, as 12 kilometers, i.e., 7.45 miles.

⁸ See Unger, *Archaeology And The Old Testament*, pp. 89-90. In Scripture we see cities counted with their villages in Jos 13; 15; 16; 19; Jdg 11.26; 1Ch 2.23; 4.32-33; 2Ch 13.19; 28.18.

3. Different Authors Use Numbers Differently

Biblical authors sometimes use numbers differently from one another.

The reader may recall Jesus' parable of the sower, that uses an *n-fold* expression, in which *n* is a number and *-fold* is a suffix that multiplies the number. Consider Luke 8.8, for example:

“... some [seed] fell into good soil and grew and yielded a hundredfold.”

This verse uses the expression, *ἐκατονταπλάσιον*, “hundredfold” (ESV) in which *ἐκατον* is the number *a hundred* and the ending *-πλάσιον* expresses the idea of *times multiplied*.⁹ This *n-fold* expression is the normal and precise *adjectival* way to express the idea of *a thing* being multiplied by a given number.¹⁰ However, Matthew and Mark, while each using *ἐκατονταπλάσιον*, “hundredfold,” (Mt 19.29; Mk 10.30), also expressed the same *n-fold* idea using cardinal numbers, *hundred* (*ἐκατὸν*), *sixty* (*ἑξήκοντα*), *thirty* (*τριάκοντα*) — without the **πλάσι** suffix (Mt 13.8,23; Mk 4.8,20). This is not a grammatical anomaly, but a known usage of cardinal numbers as *the abbreviated form of an n-fold expression*.¹¹ The important thing for us to note is that *other New Testament authors didn't use cardinal numbers to express an n-fold multiple like Matthew and Mark did*.

Therefore, if we come across an unusual numerical expression, like the Revelation's “seven spirits of God” (Re 3.1; 4.5; 5.6), we should not hastily interpret the cardinal number *seven* as signifying anything other than a quantity of seven. We should certainly not interpret it as signifying *sevenfold*, unless we can show that John used cardinal numbers in other passages to express an *n-fold* idea.¹² Similarly, when we read a number in Scripture that seems surprisingly large, like the “hundred and fifty-three” fish of John 21.11, we should not hastily

⁹ As does the *מֵאָלֶף*- suffix in Heb.

¹⁰ This contrasts with the *adverbial* description of an action occurring a number of times, for which biblical Grk uses the **κίς* suffix, as in *πεντάκις*, *five times* (2Co 11.24), *ἑπτάκις* and *ἑβδομηκοντάκις*, *seven times* and *seventy times* (Ge 4.24; Mt 18.22), and *πολλάκις*, *many times* (= *often*, Mt 17.15; Jn 18.2; Ro 1.13; etc.).

¹¹ Cf. Ge 4.24 where seventy-seven is used for seventy-sevenfold.

¹² For an explanation of the Revelation's “seven spirits of God,” see Roderick Graciano, *The Seven Spirits Of God And The Man Who Will Judge The World*, Second Edition 2025.

assume that it is an instance of hyperbole. Instead, we should examine whether John is more or less prone than the other evangelists to use numerical exaggeration in his gospel.

4. Numbers Exact, Approximate Or Exaggerated

Exact Numbers

Generally, biblical numbers express an exact quantity. One might think this fact should go without saying, but even well-meaning scholars are apt to question whether numbers in the Bible should be taken at face value. The *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery* (DBI), for example, says,

The lack of numerical exactness explains why in the Bible three, seven, and forty appear with inordinate frequency: three is a few, seven a few more, and forty a lot more.¹³

The DBI bases its assessment on evidence external to the Bible, and admits a few sentences later that, “There are ... instances in which [such numbers seem] to be a precise reckoning”¹⁴ The Bible does use approximate and even hyperbolic numbers, as explained below, but **our exegetical starting point should be to assume a number to be precise**, and then consider whether we should adjust our assessment in the light of contextual clues.

Not only are numbers in the Bible generally precise, but many of them are *demonstrably* so. Examples begin with the seven days of creation (six days of work, one of rest), Genesis 1.1 to 2.3. The Genesis narrative describes both the events of each day and each day’s completion (except in the case of the seventh), leaving no doubt that the narrative has a precise quantity of *exactly* seven days in view.¹⁵ There are many other instances in which an exact quantity is confirmed by describing or naming the constituent persons or things that comprise the total

¹³ P. 305.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Let the reader understand that while the authors of this book believe that the days of creation were literally periods of time equal to one full revolution of the earth, the question of the nature and the length of the days of creation is irrelevant to the question under consideration: Does the Bible mention any numbers clearly intended to express an *exact* quantity? The days of creation tell us that the answer is *Yes*.

quantity. Thus, we know that Jacob had exactly twelve sons, since exactly twelve are named (Ge 35.22-26). The same goes for the twelve disciples of Jesus (Mt 10.2-5). Similarly, we know that Jesus had exactly seven churches in view with his symbol of seven golden lampstands (Re 1.12,20), because He named exactly seven churches by their respective cities (Re 1.11).¹⁶ Likewise, we know that John saw exactly *seven* bowls of wrath in his revelation, because he describes what follows when each of the seven bowls are poured out.

As with John's bowls of wrath, another case involving one of the DBI's supposedly approximate numbers, appears in Genesis 18 and 19. The first of these chapters relate how Abraham looked up and saw that "three men were standing opposite him" (Ge 18.2). As the story unfolds, one of the men turns out to be the LORD. At the end of the LORD's visit with Abraham, He stays to talk with Abraham while the other men go ahead to Sodom. Genesis 19.1 confirms that these other men were "two angels" (Ge 19.1). Thus, contrary to the DBI, the number *three* in Genesis 18.2 means precisely *three*, as confirmed by the simple sum of one LORD plus two angels. The number three in the Bible is not an "approximation" for a few, nor is seven an approximation for "a few more." Thinking about biblical numbers in the DBI's imprecise way is unwarranted in view of the fact that both Hebrew and Greek have words for *few*, *more*, and *many*; the Scriptures do not use numbers to signify these generalized ideas.

Besides the Bible's *demonstrably* precise numbers, others are *implicitly* exact. For example, in the miracle of the feeding of the five thousand recorded in Mark 6, Jesus first says to His disciples, "How many loaves do you have? Go look!" The text continues, "And when they found out, they said, 'five and two fish'" (Mk 6.38). We see that the narrative flow of this verse leaves no doubt that the numbers five and two are intended to be understood as exact quantities, not approximations. Also implicitly exact is the number of fish netted by the disciples according to John

¹⁶ That exactly seven churches are addressed in the Revelation does not limit the application of their letters to those churches only. As Christ tells us at the close of each letter, "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."

21.11, *a hundred and fifty-three*.¹⁷ Had John intended this number as an approximation he would have at least rounded it to *about a hundred and fifty* (using the comparative ὥς), if not simply generalized the quantity to *more than a hundred*.

The point, again, is that **the appropriate exegetical starting point when interpreting a biblical number is to take it literally**, that is, to assume it signifies a precise quantity. This interpretation should be maintained until historical, literary or textual context demands that the literal and precise interpretation of a number be reassessed. When evidence suggests that a biblical number may not be intended as precise, we may then consider the following possibilities for its interpretation.

Rounded Numbers

Biblical numbers may be rounded, as is probably the case in passages like Judges 3.31, Judges 15.15-16, and Amos 5.3. However, even when rounded, biblical numbers always denote a specific quantity which serves as the reference point for the rounded approximation. Therefore, if a number large or small, say, “a hundred,” is interpreted as rounded number, we must read it as “approximately a hundred,” not as “a quantity significantly more or less than a hundred.”¹⁸

This principle holds true even with the rare, idiomatic “rounding” of days in the Bible. When Jesus spoke of His burial, He used Jonah’s phrase, “three days and three nights,” to describe a period of time which would conclude on the third day (not on the fourth; Mt 12.40). Esther had also used the like idiom (cf. Es 4.16 and

¹⁷ In the hundred and fifty-three fish, Augustine found allusions to the Holy Spirit overshadowing the law by this formula: “... when to the number of ten, representing the law, we add the Holy Spirit as represented by seven, we have seventeen; and when this number is used for the adding together of every several number it contains, from 1 up to itself, the sum amounts to one hundred and fifty-three” (*Tractate on the Gospel of John* 122). Serious exegesis has neither time nor place for such numerical shenanigans.

¹⁸ The probably rounded but disputed large numbers of the book of Numbers present a special problem, because the number word מֵאָה, normally translated *thousand*, both in the LXX and in our modern versions, is interpreted by some as meaning *clan* or *tribal group*, rather than a numerical quantity, in some contexts (cf. Mic 5.2).

51, with Mt 12.40 and 16.21; 17.23; 20.19). Thus, as used by Jesus, the phrase “three days and three nights” could be interpreted as meaning “approximately three days.” The idiom probably has a more technical meaning, however, and should be understood as: *a period of time stretching over parts of three consecutive days*. The point is that the phrase, even when understood as an idiomatic “rounding” of the quantity of three days, did not signify a period of time *significantly longer or shorter than one including parts of three consecutive days*. All rounded numbers in Scripture still set a specific quantity before the mind of the reader, even though that quantity is approximate rather than exact.

Explicitly Approximate Numbers

Obviously, this is also true for numbers that are *explicitly* stated as approximations. For example, the number of people gathered in the upper room after Christ’s ascension is rounded to “one hundred and twenty” (Ac 1.15), and made explicitly approximate with the word *about* (ὥς, cf. Mk 8.9; Ac 4.4). So, there were not *exactly* one hundred and twenty people in the upper room, but neither were there only a hundred or a number greater than one hundred and forty. Rounded and explicitly approximate numbers maintain the number given as their near estimate. Thus, when in his vision John describes “huge hailstones, **about** (ὥς) one hundred pounds each” (Re 16.21), readers who have not lived in extreme weather locales might think John was speaking hyperbolically, but John’s explicit approximation indicates that a hundred pounds (lit., *weighing a talent*) was his near estimate of their actual weight.¹⁹

Hyperbolic Numbers

Nevertheless, **the Bible does occasionally use numbers hyperbolically**. We should understand, though, that instances of numerical hyperbole in Scripture are never lies of exaggeration, like those of a modern fisherman bragging about the size of the fish he caught. Instead, biblical hyperbole is used for effect, either to signify *countless* (e.g. Jdg 7.12), or to express an extreme measure (e.g. Job 6.1-3), or to

¹⁹ In his gospel, John regularly uses *explicit approximations*: “about three or four miles” (Jn 6.19); “about the sixth hour” (Jn 19.14); “about one hundred yards away” (Jn 21.8).

employ a rhetorical contrast (e.g. 1Sa 18.7). When biblical hyperbole uses a finite number, the number does not necessarily represent an *extreme* exaggeration; it may express a moderate exaggeration, using a number that could still fall within the realm of reality.

For example, when the women of Israel sang that, “Saul has slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands” (1Sa 18.7; 21.11), they may or may not have employed extreme hyperbole. We must understand that the women did not mean that David had killed tens of thousands *on his own*; they were simply honoring David for having killed a greater number of Philistines with the army under his command, than the troops led by Saul had killed. The greater question regarding the hyperbole of killing “tens of thousands” arises from the suggestion of archaeological evidence that the entire Philistine population of the time may not have exceeded 18,000 people.²⁰ On the other hand, David’s misguided census of Israel’s manpower, recorded in 2 Samuel 24, reported *eight hundred thousand* Israelite men of military ability, a number of soldiers that could have easily exterminated the entire Philistine population, had that pagan population not exceeded 18,000. The scarcity of both biblical and archaeological demographic data for the time will not permit us to accurately assess *the scale* of the Israelite women’s hyperbole in their song about David. Nevertheless, their song reminds us that such hyperbole is apt to occur in lyrics, propaganda or in a rhetorical flourish, and so is usually easy to recognize. Therefore, the biblical interpreter should not hastily assume such poetic or propagandist hyperbole in historical narrative, even when numbers seem overly large.

5. Numbers Almost Never Symbolic

What We Mean By Symbolic

Symbolic numbers in Scripture are a rarity. To help us understand this fact, let us remind ourselves what is meant by the adjective *symbolic* (also *symbolical*):

²⁰ Tristan Barako in “One if by Sea ... Two if by Land: How Did the Philistines Get to Canaan?” in *Biblical Archaeology Review* 29:02, 2003.

- To say that a tangible thing is symbolic, is to say that *it represents something other than what it is itself*. In the Lord's Supper, for example, the bread and wine are symbols that represent something other than bread and wine, namely the body and blood of Christ.
- To say that an intangible thing seen in a dream or a vision is symbolic, is to say that *the thing perceived represents something other than what it is perceived as*. The stars seen by John in Revelation 1.16 and 20, for example, are symbolic in that they represent something other than stars, namely, the angels or messengers of the churches.
- To say that a word or phrase is symbolic (in other than the most basic sense in which all words are symbolic; see next paragraph), is to say that *the word or phrase is figurative, describing something other than what it would signify literally*. For example, "the almond tree" that blossoms in Ecclesiastes 12.5 is symbolic in that it is a metaphor for hair turning white with age; it represents something other than a literal almond tree.

Now, numbers in Scripture (all of which are spelled out phonetically in words, rather than written with figures), are *symbolic* only in the sense that all words are symbolic, that is, in the sense that all words signify something beyond themselves. All words signify something beyond their combination of letters in a written text. The word *horse*, for example, signifies something beyond the letter combination, h-o-r-s-e; it signifies a particular kind of quadruped. We can say, therefore, that the word *horse* "symbolizes" a large quadruped with hooves, a shaggy mane and a tail. However, we cannot say that the word *horse* symbolizes an apple in the same sense that it symbolizes the quadruped. In like manner, the word *four* signifies the quantity *one plus one plus one plus one*. If we wish, we can say that the word *four* "symbolizes" the above mentioned quantity, but we cannot say that the word *four* symbolizes a horse in the same sense that it "symbolizes" the quantity known as "four." Thus, like other nouns and adjectives, number words do not normally (apart from in a pre-defined code) signify or "symbolize" something other than the meaning assigned to them by conventional usage. The

word *ten* normally means a quantity of ten, *seventh* normally means that something occurs in position seven of a sequence, etc. **Numbers in Scripture are almost never *symbolic* in the sense of representing something other than a quantity or sequential position.**

The one exception to this rule in Scripture occurs when a number is used in an instance of *gematria*. Similar to later alpha-numeric codes, *gematria* is a system of rabbinic numerology in which the numerical values of each letter in a word can be totaled, and then that numerical total used to represent the word or the thing signified by the word. For example, the name *David*, spelled with its Hebrew consonants, is דָּוִד, *dalet vav dalet*. Since the letter *dalet* has the numerical value of four, and the *vav* has the numerical value of six, the numerical values of the letters in דָּוִד total fourteen. The number *fourteen*, then, can symbolize David by way of *gematria*.²¹

However, the only explicit use of *gematria* in the Bible is in John's number for the name of the Antichrist beast in Revelation 13.17-18.²² Many interpretations have been offered for the number *six hundred and sixty-six* in this passage, but we may not be able to confirm the name it represents until Antichrist appears. **The important thing for us to notice in connection with this instance of *gematria* is that John made this symbolism explicit**, telling us that the number represents a name, and thereby a man. Nowhere else does Scripture explicitly indicate that a number has symbolic meaning. Furthermore, since the first known evidence of Hebrew letters used as numerals does not appear until the first or second century BC,²³ and since *gematria* only became prevalent in later Jewish mystical traditions, an instance of *gematria* in the Hebrew Scriptures is all but

²¹ A few speculate that Matthew employs *gematria* in his summation of the generations between Abraham and the Messiah (Mt 1.17). Matthew repeats the number fourteen three times. Does this numerically point to the messianic name *David*?

²² Ashley, *The Book Of Numbers*, p. 62. In the Second Edition of 2022, pp. 39-40.

²³ According to the Wikipedia article on "Gematria," "The first evidence of Hebrew letters [used] as numbers dates to 78 BC" Ashley, in his *The Book Of Numbers*, p. 63, puts the date a little earlier, in the 2nd c. BC.

ruled out,²⁴ and we should not expect to find it in a New Testament passage where it is not explicitly indicated.

Most Numbers Intended As Literal

Therefore, instead of hastily interpreting a biblical number as symbolic, we should recognize that, aside from instances of *gematria* and hyperbole, **the vast majority of numbers in Scripture are clearly intended to be taken literally**, and this should be our starting interpretive assumption.²⁵ Sadly, Eckhard J. Schnabel, after he echoes Richard Bauckham's summary of what the most important biblical numbers "symbolize," tells us to approach the numbers in John's Apocalypse with exactly the opposite assumption. He writes:

This numerical symbolism suggests that **unless there is a clear indication to a literal interpretation, the numbers in John's Apocalypse should be understood to have a symbolic meaning.**²⁶

Notice that in this statement, Schnabel opposes "symbolic meaning" to "literal interpretation." By this he implies that a number in the Apocalypse must be one or the other, either literal or symbolic. With this in mind, let us test Schnabel's instruction with the number *seven* in Revelation 1.11, in which passage the Lord instructs John, "Write ... to the seven churches [in Asia]" As we mentioned in the section above on Exact Numbers, we have "a clear indication to a literal interpretation" of the number *seven* in this case, because Jesus named exactly seven churches by their respective cities (Re 1.11). Clearly in this passage, by using

²⁴ Some have suggested that the number *three hundred and eighteen*, in Ge 14.14 is an instance of *gematria* in which the number represents the name for Abraham's servant Eliezer (B. C. Birch, "Number," in ISBE), but we can ignore this imaginative speculation. Similarly, some have suggested that the number *a hundred and fifty-three* in Jn 21.11 is an instance of *gematria*, but this, like the *three hundred and eighteen* of Ge 14.14, is more likely a good example of an exact number (see point 4 above).

²⁵ Those who study levels of meaning in the Scriptures would say that we should begin with "the conventional meaning" of numbers in the Bible, before considering a possible "resonant meaning" which would take note of any connotations and allusions that might attach to a number in view.

²⁶ *40 Questions about the End Times*, p. 63, emphasis added.

the number *seven* Jesus literally signified a quantity of seven churches. In this case therefore, the number *seven* must not be symbolic.

However, Schnabel seems to disagree. He uses the seven churches as his first example under the heading, “Numerical Symbolism,” and writes,

The most important numbers in the Apocalypse are three, four, seven and twelve Most acknowledge the presence of [numerical] symbolism in at least some of the passages in the Apocalypse. It is well known that there were more churches in the province of Asia at the end of the first century than the seven churches that John singles out (Re 1.4,11; 2.1-3.22). ... Whatever the particular reason for the selection of the churches of Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea may have been, they are intended to describe “typical assemblies with regard to their histories and spiritual states.”²⁷

This is confusing! While Schnabel highlights the number *seven* in this paragraph, he doesn’t say that *seven* symbolizes something other than a quantity of seven. Instead, he names each of the seven churches of Revelation 1.11, confirming again that in Revelation 1.4 the number *seven* literally means a quantity of seven. What’s going on here?

It appears that Schnabel is committing two errors commonly made by others. These two errors appear all too frequently in Bible commentaries and other Christian literature. One is to call a number “symbolic” when in fact it is the thing quantified by the number that is figurative; we’ll say more about this in observation 7 and in the concluding application below. The second and more insidious error is **the imprecise and inconsistent use of the adjectives *literal* and *symbolic*.**

What commentators usually mean, when they describe a biblical number as *symbolic*, is either that the number under consideration is *hyperbolic*, which **does** preclude its being literal (see Hyperbolic Numbers under observation 4 above), or that the number is *connotative*²⁸ or *allusive*, both of which **do not** erase

²⁷ Ibid., p. 61.

²⁸ We often read statements like Richard Bauckham’s, who writes, “the number [seven] is the number **symbolic** of completeness,” and, “Seven, as we have noted, is the number of completeness, a **symbolic** significance ...” (*The Climax Of Prophecy*, p. 30, emphasis added).

its literal meaning (we explain connotation and allusion under observation 6 following). So, what Schnabel appears to mean with respect to the seven churches, but does not spell out for his readers, is something like the following:

While the number *seven* in the relevant verses fulfills its quantifying job *literally* by specifying exactly seven churches, it may at the same time *connote* an idea of wholeness. If so, then *seven* implies that the seven churches in view were conjointly “symbolic,” in the sense that together they were *representative* of all the churches in Asia. This in turn would underscore the fact that the messages of the letters to the churches were for all the Christian congregations.

If this is what Schnabel wished to say, it is a fine interpretation, and he should rearticulate his comments about the seven churches in a manner that doesn’t abet the imprecise and ambiguous branding of all the numbers of Revelation as “symbolic.”

What Bauckham means is that the number seven *connotes* the idea of completeness and has a *connotative* significance.

Expositors not only refer imprecisely to biblical numbers as “symbolic,” but are also apt to declare on their own authority what a particular number symbolizes. Bauckham, for example, declares that “quite clear in its **symbolism** is the number four, **which is the number of the world**” (ibid., p. 31, emphasis added). Schnabel follows him, saying, “Four is the number of the world” (*Forty Questions*, p. 62). To support his definitive identification of the number four’s “symbolism,” Bauckham (with Schnabel writing similarly) cites references to the four winds, the four corners of the earth, and various fourfold divisions of creation found in the Revelation. These citations are insightful in connecting various things in the Revelation having a fourfold aspect, but they lead Bauckham, with Schnabel following, to erroneously posit that the “four parts of creation are respectively the targets of [only the first four] judgments of ... all three series of seven judgments.” By his own exegetical standard, the judgments of the sixth seal, the fifth trumpet, and the fifth bowl also impact the creation. Regardless, the Scriptures nowhere tell us directly that, “four is the number of the world,” and even Bauckham cites as an exception to the idea an instance in which the creation is described in only a threefold division (ibid., p. 32). How then can we say definitively that four *is not* the number of something else, like God’s throne and its four living beings (Eze 1 and 10; Re 4-7; 15.7; 19.4)? At best we may say, “the number four sometimes connotes a region of the world (like a rectangular region including the Holy Land), or a fourfold aspect of the earthly sphere.” We must not limit the number four as if it always and only connotes the world or creation; biblical numbers are not used connotatively with that kind of consistency. As Bauckham says about one of the Bible’s most important numbers, “Three seems to be a number without a consistent symbolic significance,” ibid., p. 32.

However, Schnabel presses his assertion that, “the numbers in John’s Apocalypse should be understood to have a symbolic meaning,” by immediately citing the number 666 of Revelation 13.18. As we have just explained, though, the number 666 is an instance of *gematria* and the only explicitly symbolic number in the entire Bible. As such, 666 in no way implies that any other numbers in the Revelation should be understood symbolically, and in fact militates against that idea!

But Schnabel has more. He supports the idea of the Revelation’s numbers being symbolic by telling us that, “some of John’s numbers can be interpreted in the context of Pythagorean mathematics, which conceived of numbers as corresponding to geometrical figures.”²⁹ He supports *this* observation by listing the following points:

- “John uses square numbers for the people of God”;
- “John states that the New Jerusalem is square (Re 21.16)”;
- “[John] uses the number twelve exactly twelve times in the description of the New Jerusalem”;
- “John also uses rectangular numbers: the apocalyptic period of the end times lasts 42 months The number 42 is the sixth rectangular number (6×7)”;
- “It seems that John deliberately chose rectangular numbers to describe the period during which the beast reigns (triangular number) persecuting the people of God (square number)”³⁰

Schnabel then concludes this section by saying,

In sum, the symbolism of these numbers suggest that [most, if not all], numbers in John’s Apocalypse should be interpreted symbolically, not literally.³¹

Now, Schnabel’s stated reason for undermining the literal integrity of the numbers in the Revelation is to tell us that,

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid., pp. 63-64.

³¹ Ibid.

The symbolism of most if not all of the numbers in the Apocalypse suggest that John's focus is not on historical events for their own sake but on the meaning of God's judgment both for the world (as a call to repentance) and for the church (as a call to faithful perseverance and courageous witness).³²

We agree that the *practical meaning* of the Revelation's depictions of God's judgment is that *the world is called to repentance*, and that *the church is called to faithful perseverance and courageous witness*. But let the reader observe: this practical message is not jeopardized in the least by interpreting the numbers in the Revelation literally, nor is it enhanced by making the numbers "symbolic." Instead, it is imaginative distractions, like Schnabel's interpreting John's numbers in terms of Pythagorean geometry (instead of in terms of allusions to Old Testament realities³³), that diminish the practical meaning of the Revelation. So, instead of taking Schnabel's suggestion that, "unless there is a clear indication to a literal interpretation, the numbers in John's Apocalypse should be understood to have a symbolic meaning," we reiterate that, aside from instances of *gematria* and hyperbole, **the vast majority of numbers in Scripture — including those in the Revelation — should be understood literally.**

We also remind ourselves that Schnabel and many others misspeak when they refer to biblical numbers as "symbolic." They really mean that the numbers carry allusive or connotative freight *along with their literal meanings that quantify and sequence*. Once we recognize the imprecision of calling biblical numbers "symbolic," and simultaneously become mindful of the twofold work of biblical numbers (quantifying/sequencing + alluding/connotating), we can return to our interpretive principle of *first assuming that biblical numbers are intended literally*, even in books like Daniel and Revelation. When we read in Daniel 7.3 that Daniel had a vision of "four great beasts coming up from the sea," we understand that the number *four* may carry a connotation, but in its quantifying work it literally means *a quantity of four*. When we read that Daniel saw a beast

³² Ibid., pp. 64-65.

³³ The New Jerusalem is more than a square; it is cubical like the ancient Holy of Holies, 1Ki 6.20; Re 21.16).

with ten horns (Da 7.7), we understand that the number *ten* may be connotative, and that the beast and its horns are indeed figurative, but for Daniel, *ten* literally signifies a quantity of “ten.” Likewise, in the book of Revelation, John saw literally *four* living creatures around the throne (Re 4.6), *seven* seals on the scroll (Re 5.1), *two* wings of the great eagle (Re 12.14), etc.

So, with the literal character and conventional meaning of biblical numbers firmly in mind, let us say a little more about the additional meaning that numbers can carry.

6. Numbers Can Connote And Allude

Along with their fundamental functions of quantifying and sequencing, **biblical numbers often express additional meaning by connotation or allusion.** For example, the number seven may connote the action of completion or the state of completeness, or may allude to an antecedent group of seven things, like the seven days of creation. For another example, while the mathematical product *one hundred and forty-four thousand* is unique to the book of Revelation (Re 7.4; 14.1,3), the factor *twelve thousand* (Re 7.4-8) appears frequently as a military number in the Old Testament (see table below of Possible Connotations & Allusions). Therefore, while the numbers *twelve thousand* and *one hundred and forty-four thousand* in the book of Revelation signify precise numerical quantities, they also have a military connotation that encourages the reader to interpret the group of Israelites sealed in Revelation 7 as a *militant group* in some sense. We hasten to add, however, that allusions are rarely explicit in the biblical text, and connotations even less so; therefore, the reader should find a rationale in the surrounding context before deciding that a number (or anything else in the text) connotes something or alludes to a precedent. Furthermore, even when an allusion or connotation is quite certain, we must recognize that it supports — but is not equal to — the primary meaning of the text. Nevertheless, connotation and allusion are literary devices that add meaning, and enrich the reader’s enjoyment of a text.

We note that along with precise numbers, rounded and approximate numbers can also carry a connotation or an allusion. For example, the explicitly

approximate number of the “one hundred and twenty” believers gathered in the upper room (Ac 1.15) may allude to death of Moses (Dt 34.7), underscoring the assembly of believers as an event marking a new era. Alternatively, the “one hundred and twenty” may allude to the dedication of Solomon’s temple when 120 priests blew trumpets and the glory of God filled the building (2Ch 5.11-14). We see that any given biblical number may fall into one of various categories, from *exact*, or *rounded*, or *explicitly approximate* to *hyperbolically exaggerated*, while at the same time conveying a connotation or an allusion (see the table below on the Possible Categories For Cardinal Numbers In The Bible).

7. Numbers With Figurative Nouns

Whether or not a biblical number itself carries additional meaning by way of connotation or allusion, it may quantify or sequence a noun or noun phrase that does convey more than its literal meaning. For example, in Revelation 15.7, John describes seeing “seven golden bowls full of the wrath of God” given to seven angels who subsequently pour the bowls out on the earth. In this part of John’s vision, we can take the number *seven* as literally signifying a quantity of seven, though it also *connotes* the fullness and the completion of God’s judgment (Re 15.1). However, while we should understand the number *seven* according to its conventional meaning, the golden bowls quantified by the number seven are surely figurative; how could God’s wrath be literally held in a material bowl? The golden bowls probably represent something like the pure justice of the judgment they “contain,” and the divine authority given to each angel to act as the agent of the judgment he “pours out.” The point, we reiterate, is that **biblical numbers are usually literal but they may quantify something that is to be understood figuratively.**

Concluding With An Application

To conclude this appendix, let us apply the preceding observations about biblical numbers in an analysis of the phrase “a thousand years” that occurs six times in the book of Revelation (Re 20.2-7).

In application of our **first observation** we check to see whether there may be manuscript evidence for a variant reading of the phrase. Though the book of Revelation has a complex textual tradition, and does not lack for manuscript variants, “the basic text of the book isn’t in dispute”³⁴ Accordingly, when we peruse *The Center for New Testament Textual Studies NT Critical Apparatus*,³⁵ we find that no ancient manuscript gives a different number than *a thousand* nor any other time period than *years* in the Revelation verses that mention the *thousand years*. We may, therefore, discard any concern regarding a scribal error having occurred with the Revelation’s phrase *thousand years*.

To apply our **second observation** we must investigate whether people in Bible times meant the same thing by the chronological measurement of *a thousand years* as we do today. When we do, we find that some scholars speculate that the *Hebrew word* “אלף,” almost always translated *thousand* in the Bible, might occasionally mean *group* or *clan*, when referring to numbers of persons.³⁶ That speculation is irrelevant here, since we are concerned with the numbering of years, not persons. More relevant is the fact that the *Greek word* in the LXX and New Testament, “χίλιοι,” has always meant *a thousand* since the time of Homer. Furthermore, we see the meaning of χίλιοι confirmed in the book of Revelation when ἡμέρας χιλίας διακοσίας ἐξήκοντα, *one thousand two hundred and sixty days* (Re 11.3; 12.6), is made to correspond to μῆνας τεσσεράκοντα δύο, *forty-two months* (Re 11.2),³⁷ and also to καιρὸν καὶ καιροὺς καὶ ἥμισυ καιροῦ, *a time and times and half a time* (Re 12.14).³⁸ It appears that John, in the very book containing our test phrase, uses χίλιοι, *thousand*, in its normal sense of a quantity equivalent to ten hundreds.

³⁴ Thomas R. Schreiner, *Revelation*, p. 56-58.

³⁵ From the H. Milton Haggard Center for New Testament Textual Studies, 2021. Available as a resource in Logos Bible Software.

³⁶ E.g. Is 60.22 NASB. See Timothy R. Ashley, *The Book Of Numbers*, p. 63.

³⁷ I.e. lunar months of 30 days each.

³⁸ I.e. three and a half years, using Daniels expression (Da 7.25; 12.7).

We might wonder, though, if the phrase *a thousand* has a more general meaning in 2 Peter 3.8,

... with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years like one day.

Couldn't we paraphrase this as, "with the Lord one day is like a *very long time*"? Sure, but **a paraphrase is only as good as its correspondence to the source text**. If we used such a generalized paraphrase of 2 Peter 3.8 in our teaching, someone would likely respond, "Okay, but what do you mean by 'a very long time'?" We would have to answer, "Well, a thousand years, more or less." Any other answer would completely sever the paraphrase from its biblical basis. To suggest that Peter might have meant that "a day with the Lord is like *thousands of years*" would reduce the interpretation to speculation. In reality, Peter, like Moses in Psalm 90.4, used the *definite period* of "a thousand years" to give a particular nuance to the comparisons, "like one day," and "like yesterday when it is past." Furthermore, Peter and Moses used *a thousand years* to give us perspective on God's relationship to *our experience of time*, not to give us a variant meaning for *a thousand years*. Regardless, even if a paraphrase of 2 Peter 3.8 and Psalm 90.4 as referring to *a very long time* were appropriate, the phrase we're investigating in Revelation 20 is not used in a comparison between God's experience of time and ours, but is stated straightforwardly as a simple duration of time.

So, John apparently means a thousand when he uses the word *thousand*, but in application of our **seventh observation**, shouldn't we ask if John might intend a figurative meaning when he uses the word *years*? In fact, doesn't the word *year* sometimes mean a significantly longer time, as it does in Jesus' quotation of Isaiah 61.2, in the phrase, "the favorable year of the LORD"? In Isaiah 61.2, and Jesus' quotation of it (Lk 4.19), the word *year* does indeed have a figurative meaning, and speaks of the eschatological jubilee (i.e. release of captives, cf. Le 25.10).³⁹ Since Isaiah equated this "favorable year of the LORD with "the day of

³⁹ The eschatological jubilee was foreshadowed by Jesus' healing and deliverance ministry during His first-coming ministry (Lk 4.21; 7.22).

vengeance of our God” (Is 61.2; cf. 34.8; 63.4) we realize that the figurative year in this verse is tantamount to the eschatological day of the LORD, a “day” we know will last much longer than a solar year (see the excursus on The Day Of The LORD in the main narrative above). Thus, Isaiah does provide us with a precedent for using the word *year* to signify a much longer period of time. Is it possible that John used the word *year* in this figurative way?

Now we must apply a generalization of our **third observation**, that biblical authors sometimes use *words* differently from one another. Upon investigation, we find that Isaiah alone used the word *year* in a synonymous parallelism with the *day of the LORD*. Furthermore, Isaiah always used *year* and *day* together in the same verse when he employed this figurative use of *year*. In his many other uses of the word *year*, he always used *year* in its conventional sense. We would expect, therefore, that if John were to imitate Isaiah’s figurative use of *year*, he would have likewise paired the figurative use of *year* with a figurative use of *day*, as Isaiah did. Instead, in both his gospel and in the Revelation (not counting chapter 20), John always used the word *year* in its literal sense. In fact, in Revelation 9.15, as if to assure us that by *year* he means year, John describes angels who had been prepared for a particular “hour and day and month and year” Nowhere in his writings does John give us a hint that he uses the word *year* figuratively, so we should hardly expect a figurative use of *years* in Revelation 20.

Still, we must apply our **fourth observation** and consider whether the number *a thousand* in the Revelation’s *thousand years* might be less than exact. We see that in John’s usage, his *thousand years* is not explicitly approximate; he never writes *like*, *as*, or *about a thousand years*. Might his number *a thousand* nevertheless be rounded or exaggerated? The answer is Yes. However, if John intended that his phrase *a thousand years* be taken as using a rounded number, then we must read the phrase as signifying “approximately a thousand years.” This would mean that the duration John had in view was something between 900 and 1,100 years, *not* something like 300 years or 2,000 years. Alternatively, if John used his phrase *a thousand years* hyperbolically, then it would mean “a duration

of time that is *less than* a thousand years, but long enough so as to seem like a millennium.” If we tentatively assume that John’s *thousand years* is hyperbolic, we must note that there is nothing in Revelation 20 to suggest that the hyperbole is extreme, but we must remember that the more extreme the numerical hyperbole, the smaller the real quantity.

All things considered, it appears that in accord with our **fifth observation**, we would do well to take John’s phrases in Revelation 20, *a thousand years* and *the thousand years* as literal and precise. Nevertheless, we may in good conscience take them as involving a rounded (and thereby *approximate*) number or as employing numerical hyperbole. However, if we choose one of these less than precise interpretations, we must recognize that they limit the duration of John’s *thousand years* to between 900 and 1,100 years *or less*.⁴⁰

We may now conclude with an application of our **sixth observation** and consider whether besides its plain meaning, John’s phrase *a thousand years* might connote an additional idea or allude to something in the earlier Scriptures. *It is not necessary* to find a connotation or allusion attached to a biblical number; a number may serve solely in its purpose of quantifying or sequencing. However, the many commentators who say that numbers in apocalyptic literature are “always” or “often” *symbolic*, are nearly correct in spite of their incorrect use of the word *symbolic*: **numbers in apocalyptic passages are often connotative or allusive**. So, how about the Revelation’s *thousand years*?

While the number *a thousand* is common in Scripture, outside of the Revelation it only quantifies a number of years three times, and only appears in the phrase *a thousand years* twice.⁴¹ However, *the idea* of a thousand years is an invisible presence throughout Genesis 5, in that the first seven ancestors of

⁴⁰ This is bad news for amillennial interpretations of Re 20. Whether we take the *thousand years* of Re 20 as signifying a precise duration of a thousand years, or a less exact duration of no more than 1,100 years, it is impossible that John’s phrase *a thousand years* referred prophetically to our present *much longer* “church age.”

⁴¹ In Ps 90.4, and in Peter’s paraphrase of Ps 90.4 (2Pe 3.8). Ec 6.6 speaks of the vanity of living *two thousand years* without enjoying good things.

Lamech, Noah's father, excluding the special case of Enoch, all lived for a duration just short of *a thousand years*. Adam's life span of "nine hundred and thirty years" (Ge 5.5) is of particular interest to us here, because in Jewish Midrash, the idea emerged that the "day" in which Adam died for eating the forbidden fruit (Ge 2.17) was literally a single day for God. This was based on the inference that God's days — in contrast to earth days — are a thousand years long, supported by an appeal to Psalm 90.4, like we find in the Book of Jubilees 4.30:

Adam ... lacked seventy years from one thousand years, for a thousand years are like one day in the testimony of heaven and therefore it was written concerning the tree of knowledge, "In the day you eat from it you will die." Therefore he did not complete the years of this day because he died in it.⁴²

The book of Jubilees was composed prior to 100 BC, and later Jewish writers elaborated upon its idea of God's days lasting a thousand earth-years. Louis Ginzberg provides an excerpt of the composite legend:

[Adam] heard what the angels were saying to one another about his fall, and what they were saying to God. In astonishment the angels exclaimed: "What! He still walks about in Paradise? He is not yet dead?" Whereupon God: "I said to him, 'In the day that thou eatest thereof, thou shalt surely die!' Now, ye know not what manner of day I meant — one of My days of a thousand years, or one of your days. I will give him one of My days. He shall have nine hundred and thirty years to live, and seventy to leave to his descendants."⁴³

We do not suggest that this idea, that "God-days" last a thousand years, derives from a correct exegesis of the relevant biblical passages. Nevertheless, since the tradition developed in the intertestamental period, it would have been known in John's time.⁴⁴ Apparently, therefore, if the *thousand-years* phrases of Revelation 20 evoked something in addition to their literal meaning for the original hearers, it would have been the traditional duration of "a day of God" (cf. Re 16.14).

⁴² Charlesworth, Vol. 2, pp. 63-64. Also known as the *Little Genesis*, Jubilees was used by the Qumran community and later by various church fathers.

⁴³ *Legends Of The Jews*, pp.73-74.

⁴⁴ We know that biblical authors were able to allude to non-canonical works, as Paul alluded to the apocryphal book of Wisdom 5.17-20 with his summary of the "full armor of God" in Eph 6.13-17.

POSSIBLE CATEGORIES FOR CARDINAL NUMBERS IN THE BIBLE

ERROR	EXACT	ROUNDED	EXPLICITLY APPROXIMATE	HYPERBOLICAL
Scribal, Corrected By Cross Ref., e.g. 2Ch 22.2; 2Ki 8.26	Connotative, e.g. Re 7.4-8	Connotative, e.g. Jdg 15.15- 16	Connotative	Connotative
Scribal Addend Error Corrected By Sum, e.g. Nu 3.15- 39	Allusive, e.g. Jdg 17.2 with 16.5; Re 13.18 with 1Ki 10.14; 2Ch 9.13	Allusive, e.g. Mt 12.40 with Es 4.16; Jon 1.17	Allusive, e.g. Lk 3.23 with Nu 4; Ac 1.15 with 2Ch 5.11-14; Re 16.21 with Ex 25.9 or 2Sa 12.30 ⁴⁵	Allusive
	Monetary Transaction, e.g. Mt 26.15	Non- Monetary Rounding With Zero, e.g. Am 5.3		= Countless, e.g. Jdg 7.12; Re 5.11
	Precise To The One Column, e.g. Jn 21.11	Idiomatic Rounding, e.g. Mt 12.40		= Beyond Measure, e.g. Ge 41.49; Dt 1.11; Job 6.1-3
	Gematria, e.g. Re 13.17-18			Rhetorical Comparison, e.g. 1Sa 18.7

In the above table, a biblical number should only fit in one column unless it is an erroneous number, in which case it may fit in another column as well as the Error column. Numbers will often fit in multiple *rows* in the same column, as do the *threes* in the phrase *three days and three nights* of Matthew 12.40, since they represent an instance of idiomatic

⁴⁵ This allusion occurs by way of the connection between *ταλαντιαία* (weighing a talent) and *τάλαντον* (a talent).

rounding as well as serving to allude to previous passages. We should avoid trying to put any other number than 666 in the *Gematria* category.

POSSIBLE CONNOTATIONS & ALLUSIONS OF BIBLICAL NUMBERS

NUMBER	CONNOTATIONS	ALLUSIONS
1	Marriage , Ge 2.24; Eph 5.31; Deity , Dt 6.4; Unity , 1Co 12.13; Eph 4.4-6; Re 17.13; Uniqueness , Ex 9.14; Is 45.5,21; 46.9; Brevity , Mt 20.12; 26.40; Re 17.12; 18.8,10,17,19; Smallest Quantity , Mt 23.15	Deity, Uniqueness , Mt. 19.17; 23.8; Smallest Quantity , Mt 18.12; 25.15, 40,45
2	Help , Ec 4.9-10; Witness, Testimony , Dt 17.6; 19.15; 1Ti 5.19; Heb 10.28	Law of Testimony , Mt 18.16; 26.60; Mk 6.7; Lk 10.1; Re 11.3
3	Plague of Darkness , Ex 10.21-23; Witness, Testimony , Dt 17.6; 19.15; Mt 18.16; Heb 10.28; Thoroughness , Jn 21.17; Strength , Ec 4.12; God's Holiness , Is 6.3	Law of Testimony , Mt 26.75; 1Ti 5.19; The Three Patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob); The Three Pilgrimage Festivals (Passover, Shavuot, and Sukkot); The Tanakh? (Torah, Nevi'im, and Kethuvim); The Tabernacle? (court, holy place, Holy of Holies)
4	Extremities, Universality , Je 49.36; Eze 46.21; Da 8.8; Re 7.1; 9.14,15; The Biblical World , Is 11.11-12	The Tetragrammaton? The Matriarchs? (Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel, and Leah); The Rivers of Eden? Ge 2.10; The Throne of God? Eze 1; Re 4
5	Redemption of firstborn , Nu 3.47; Pagan Rulers , Jos 10.5; Jdg 3.3; 1Sa 6.4	The Pentateuch? The megillot? (Song, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, and Esther); Five indigenous grains of Israel? (wheat, barley, spelt, oats, and rye)
6	Days of work , Ex 20.9; 23.12; 31.15; Years of indenture , Ex 21.2; Dt 15.12; Years of planting , Le 25.3; Refuge, Cities of Refuge , Nu 35.6,13,15	Work, Days of Work , Ru 3.17; Days Before Sabbath , 2Sa 6.13; 1Ki 10.18-19
7	Creation , Ge 1.1 to 2.3; Completion, Completeness , 1Ki 6.8; Re 15.1; quantities of seven, even when the word	

	<i>seven</i> is not used, often carry one of these connotations, as with the number of times that a sickle is mentioned in Re 14; Rest (weekly sabbath and sabbatical year); Purity and Holiness , Ge 7.2; Ex 29.35-37; Ordination , Le 8.33-35	
8	Circumcision, Covenant , Ge 17.11-12	
10	Plagues, Judgments, Law, Covenant , Ex 34.28; Dt 4.13; 10.4 The Tabernacle , Ex 26.1,16; 27.12; 36.8,21; 38.12; Sufficiency, Enough , Ge 18.32; 24.10,55; 31.7; Nu 14.22; Ru 4.2; 1Sa 25.5; Job 19.3; Da 1.14	
12	Israel , Ex 24.4. ⁴⁶	Israel, Tribes of Israel , 1Ki 7.23-25; Mk 3.14; Re 12.1; 22.2
20	Military Age , Nu 1	
24	Israel Enhanced? Re 4.4,10; 5.8; 11.16; 19.4	
30	Priesthood , (foreshadowed, Gen 41.46?) Num 4; Price of Slave , Ex 21.32; Mourning , Nu 20.29; Dt 34.8	Priestly Responsibility , 2Sa 5.4; Lk 3.23; Slave Status , Zec 11.12-13
40	Hardship, Suffering, Judgment , Ge 7.4; Nu 14.33; Dt 25.3; Jdg 13.1; Ps 95.10; Jon 3.4; Eze 4.6	Israel's Sojourn In The Wilderness; Hardship , Mt 4.2
50	Retirement (age) , Nu 4.3,23,30; 8.25-26; Jubilee, Redemption, Liberation , Le 25.11-12; Harvest , Dt 16.9-14	Age of Retirement , Jn 8.57
70	The Nations , Ge 10; The Nation of Israel , Ex 24.1,9; Nu 11.16, 24-25; Exile , Je 25.11-12; 2Ch 36.21; Healthy Lifespan , Ps 90.10	Israel and Nations? (i.e. duration before reconciled), Da 9.24

⁴⁶ Bauckham and Schnabel overly generalize the connotation of this number as to "the people of God," and obscure its reference to Israel.

80	Advanced Age , Ps 90.10	
100	Old Age , Ge 17.17; Military Unit , 2Sa 18.4; Completeness? Mt 18.12-13; Blessing (Agricultural) , Ge 26.12; Mt 13.8	Military Unit , Le 26.8
120		Death of Moses , Dt 34.7; Dedication of temple, coming of Shekinah ; Ac 1.15 with 2Ch 5.11-14
600	Military Unit , Ex 14.7; Jdg 3.31; 18.11,16-17; 1Sa 14.2; 23.13; Roman Cohort , Mt 27.27; etc.	
1,000	Military Unit , Nu 31.4-5; 2Sa 10.6; The Unreachable Age For Fallen Man; Traditional Duration Of A “God Day,” Jub 4.30; Ge 2.17; 5.5; cf. Ps 90.3	Military Unit , Jdg 15.16; A Day of God , The <i>thousand years</i> of Re 20.2-7 with the intertestamental tradition of Jubilees 4.30
12,000	Military Division , Nu 31.4-5; Jdg 21.10; 2Sa 10.6; 1Ki 4.26; 10.26; 2Ch 1.14; 9.25	Militant/Military Divisions , Re 7.5-8
144,00	Multiple Military Divisions?	Warriors , Re 7.4; 14.1,3; Defensive Walls? Re 21.17
200,000,000	Spiritual Forces? Re 9.16	μυριάς (10,000) is usually associated with a large military division (1Sa 18.7-8; 21.11; 29.5; Jdth 2.15; 16.3; 1Ma 15.13), “the myriads of Israel” (Nu 10.35) or with the armies and/or worshippers of heaven, i.e. angels and saints (Dt 33.2; Da 7.10; Heb 12.22; Jud 14; Re 5.11)

Connotation prompts *direct* evocation; the evocative content of a connotative word or phrase is either innate or directly implied. Allusion prompts *indirect* evocation by first recalling an antecedent thing or proposition and then suggesting a relationship between the allusion and its antecedent. A connotative passage may provide the basis for an allusion. An allusive phrase may at the same time be connotative, and vice versa. Therefore, it is sometimes difficult to decide whether a specific instance of a word, phrase, or *number*, should go in the connotative or allusive column, or both.

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